

down from the north of Italy along the Flaminian Way, and in less than two months after the fall of Verona, he was at Saxa Rubra, only nine miles from Rome, with an army eager for battle and confident of victory. There he found the troops of Maxentius drawn up in battle array, but posted in a position which none but a fool or a madman would have selected. The probabilities are that Maxentius could not trust the citizens of Rome and therefore dared not stand a siege within the ramparts of Aurelian. Then, having decided to offer battle, he allowed his army to cross the Tiber and take up ground whence, if defeated, their only roads of escape lay over the narrow Milvian Bridge and a flimsy bridge of boats, one probably on either flank.

It is said that Maxentius had not intended to be present in person when the issue was decided. He was holding festival within the city, celebrating his birthday with the usual games and pretending that the proximity of Constantine caused him no alarm. The populace began to taunt him with cowardice, and uttered the ominous shout that Constantine was invincible. Maxentius's fears grew as the clamour swelled in volume. He hurriedly called for the Sibylline Books and ordered them to be consulted. These gave answer that on that very day the enemy of the Romans should perish—a characteristically safe reply. Such ambiguity of diction had usually portended the death of the consulting Prince, but Lactantius says that the hopes with which the words inspired Maxentius led him to put on his armour and ride out of Rome.